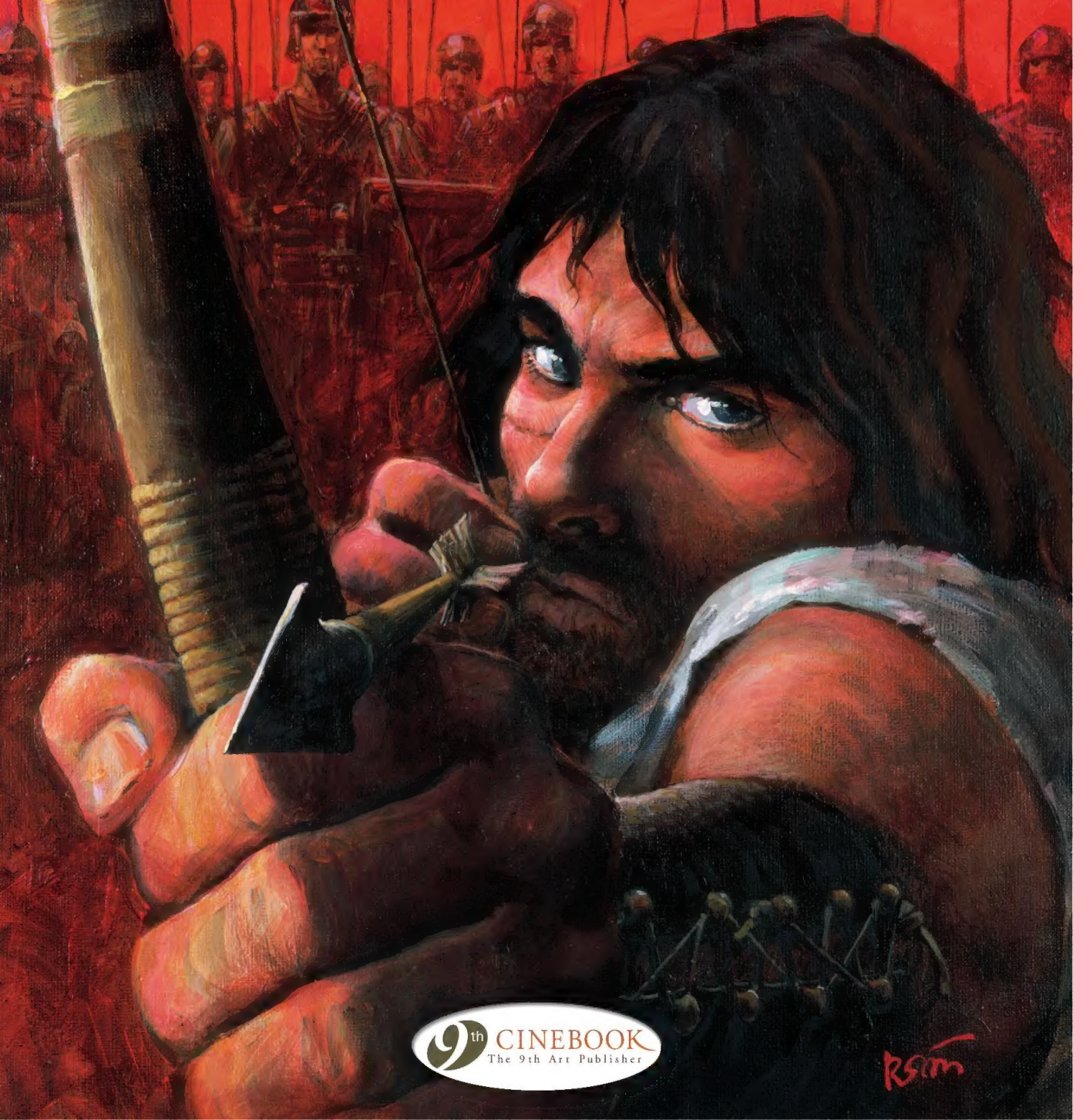




THORCAL

The Barbarian

ARTWORK G. ROSINSKI - J. VAN HAMME SCRIPT



G. ROSINSKI - J. VAN HAMME

ARTWORK

SCRIPT

THORCAL

The Barbarian



COLOURS: GRAZA

Original title: Thorgal 27 – Le barbare
Original edition: © Rosinski & Van Hamme, 2002, Editions du Lombard
(Dargaud-Lombard s.a.)
www.lelombard.com
All rights reserved
English translation: © 2017 Cinebook Ltd
Translator: Jerome Saincantin
Editor: Erica Olson Jeffrey
Lettering and text layout: Design Amorandi
Printed in Spain by EGEDSA
This edition first published in Great Britain in 2017 by
Cinebook Ltd
56 Beech Avenue
Canterbury, Kent
CT4 7TA
www.cinebook.com
A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library
ISBN 978-1-84918-399-4



WELL, MASTER JAFFAR, WHAT DID YOU BRING US THIS TIME?

THE BEST QUALITY, AS ALWAYS, MY LORD STEWARD.



LEAVING YOU FIRST CHOICE AS WELL, OF COURSE.

BECAUSE YOU KNOW THE GOVERNOR IS YOUR BEST CUSTOMER, YOU OLD MISER.



GOOD. I NEED SIX GALLEY SLAVES AND FIVE FOR OUR MARBLE QUARRIES. AT THE USUAL PRICE, PLUS MY COMMISSION, OBVIOUSLY.

I SHALL DELIVER THEM TO THE PALACE BEFORE NOON, MY LORD STEWARD.



WELL, WELL... WHAT HAVE WE HERE!?

BARBARIANS, I THINK. A CARAVAN DRIVER FOUND THEM IN THE GREAT DESERT, DYING OF THIRST AND EXHAUSTION, AND SOLD THEM TO ME A MONTH AGO.

STRANGE... WHAT COULD THEY HAVE BEEN DOING SO FAR SOUTH? SHIPWRECKED SAILORS, NO DOUBT.

ANYWAY, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT ME TO DO WITH THEM? THEY CAN HARDLY STAND, AND ONE OF THEM IS ONLY A CHILD!

WITH A FEW DAYS OF REST AND PLENTY OF FOOD, THEY'LL BE THE PICTURE OF HEALTH, MY LORD STEWARD. I'LL LET YOU HAVE THEM BOTH FOR 50 PIECES OF SILVER. A STEAL AT THAT PRICE.

HMM... BARBARIANS MAKE GOOD FIGHTERS BUT FRACTIOUS SLAVES. STILL, I NEED ANOTHER COUPLE OF 'FUGITIVES' FOR THE HUNTING TRIAL IN TWO DAYS. I'LL GIVE YOU 20 PIECES FOR THEM.

TWENTY?!? FEEDING THEM AND NURSING THEM BACK TO HEALTH COST ME MORE THAN THAT! MAKE IT 45 SILVER PIECES!

FOR GAME?! YOU MUST BE JOKING: 25 PIECES.

40

30

35

IT'S 30, AND THAT'S MY FINAL OFFER.

SO BE IT — BECAUSE IT'S YOU, MY LORD. BUT YOU ARE RIPPING OUT MY HEART.

EVERY TIME IT GETS RIPPED OUT — WHICH IS ALL THE TIME — THAT HEART OF YOURS GROWS BACK. BEMBA, UNTIE THEM AND KEEP THEM APART FROM THE OTHERS.

MASTER JAFFAR...

FOR A MONTH YOU'VE KEPT ME AWAY FROM MY WIFE AND CHILDREN. IF THE GODS WILL IT, I SHALL BE THAT MAN'S SLAVE. AT LEAST LET ME HOLD MY FAMILY ONE LAST TIME.

WHAT FOR, BARBARIAN?

EITHER THE STEWARD HERE WILL BUY THEM TOO AND YOU'LL SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN, OR THEY'LL BE SOLD TO OTHER MASTERS AND YOU NEVER WILL. SO, WHAT FOR?

THEY ARE WHAT IS MOST PRECIOUS TO ME. DON'T YOU EVER FEEL COMPASSION?

I AM A SLAVE MERCHANT, LIKE MY FATHER BEFORE ME, AND HIS FATHER BEFORE HIM. THE FIRST THING THEY TAUGHT ME IS THAT A SLAVE MERCHANT MUST NEVER FEEL ANYTHING FOR HIS MERCHANDISE. TAKE THEM AWAY, BEMBA!

WHAT DID I TELL YOU?
THOSE BARBARIANS ARE
COMPLICATED PEOPLE.
I'D BE CURIOUS TO SEE
THE FAMILY THAT'S SO
IMPORTANT TO HIM.



THIS WAY, MY LORD
STEWARD. WOMEN
AND CHILDREN
AREN'T SUPPOSED
TO BE SOLD BEFORE
THIS AFTERNOON,
BUT FOR YOU...

HMM... THE MOTHER ISN'T
BAD, BUT SHE'S TOO OLD,
AND THE CHILDREN TOO
YOUNG. WHO'S THE LITTLE
REDHEAD?



I THINK SHE'S
THE SISTER OF THE
YOUNG BARBARIAN
YOU JUST BOUGHT
WITH THE OLDER
ONE.

SHE'LL NEED PLUMPING UP A BIT,
BUT THAT SHOULD BE FINE. OUR
SOLDIERS ARE ALWAYS COMPLAINING
ABOUT THE LACK OF FAIR-SKINNED
WOMEN IN THEIR BROTHELS.



DON'T...
DON'T TOUCH ME!

WHAT SORT OF MONSTERS ARE YOU
TO BUY AND SELL HUMAN BEINGS?
TO TREAT THEM AS YOU WOULD A
PIECE OF FURNITURE OR A DOG?
I WILL NEVER LET YOU—



HO!...

NO, DON'T DAMAGE
HER. I'LL TAKE
HER.



THE GOVERNOR ASKED
ME TO FIND HIM A BIRTHDAY
PRESENT FOR HIS SON
HERACLIUS'S EIGHTEENTH
BIRTHDAY. I HAVE A FEELING
THIS FIERY-HAIRED
PANTHER WILL DO
JUST FINE.



GET IN THERE, YOU TWO!
AND MOVE IT! YOUR
GOOD TIMES OF BEING
PAMPERED BY MASTER
JAFFAR ARE OVER!





I'M HUNGRY.
WHEN DO THEY
FEED US?

NEVER.



THEY DON'T FEED THE
FUGITIVES FOR TWO DAYS
BEFORE THE HUNT. JUST
A LITTLE STAGNANT
WATER TO DRINK.

THEY WANT
TO STARVE
US?

NO,
SIMPLY
WEAKEN
US.



AS IF WE WEREN'T
WEAK ENOUGH AL-
READY. YOUR WORLD
IS A GRIM PLACE,
THORGAL. I LIKED
MINE BETTER.

TELL
US ABOUT
THAT HUNT,
OLD MAN.



EVERY THREE MONTHS,
THE YOUNG NOBLES OF
THE GOVERNOR'S COURT
WHO HAVE REACHED 18
TAKE THEIR OFFICER EXAMS.
ONE OF THE TRIALS IS TO
CHASE AND SHOOT SOME
SO-CALLED FUGITIVES.

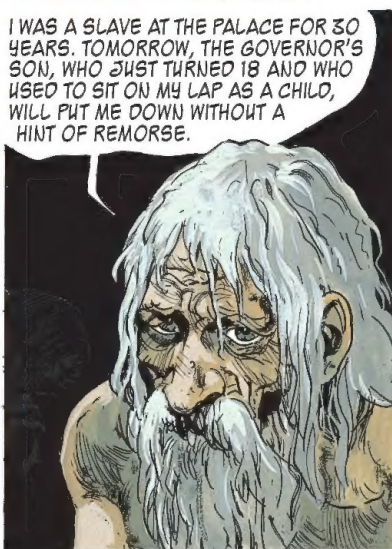


IT'S A TEST OF THEIR
SKILL WITH A BOW BUT
ALSO A WAY TO GET
THEM USED TO KILLING,
AS ANY GOOD SOLDIER
MUST BE ABLE TO DO
WITHOUT HESITATION.

AND ... WE'RE
THE 'FUGITIVES'?



WE ARE. CONVICTED
CRIMINALS, WOUNDED
PRISONERS OF WAR, SLAVES
WHO'VE GROWN TOO OLD
LIKE ME, OR BARBARIANS
LIKE YOU.



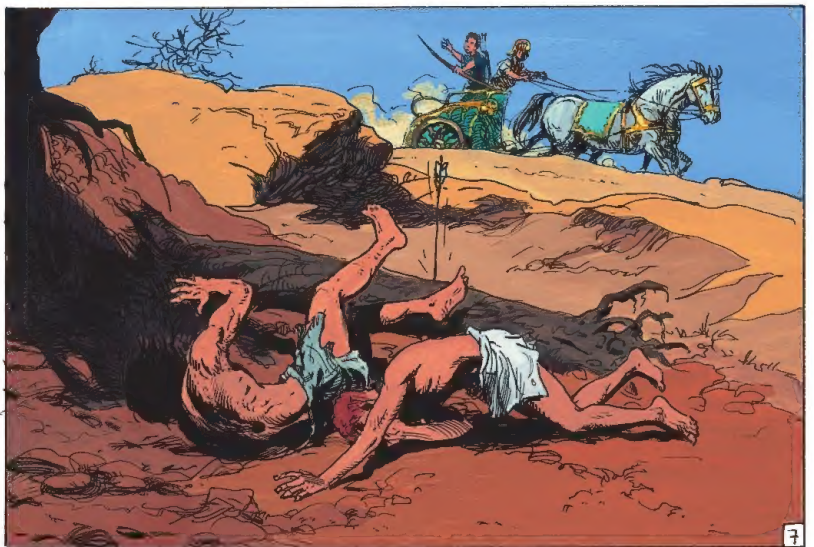
I WAS A SLAVE AT THE PALACE FOR 30
YEARS. TOMORROW, THE GOVERNOR'S
SON, WHO JUST TURNED 18 AND WHO
USED TO SIT ON MY LAP AS A CHILD,
WILL PUT ME DOWN WITHOUT A
HINT OF REMORSE.

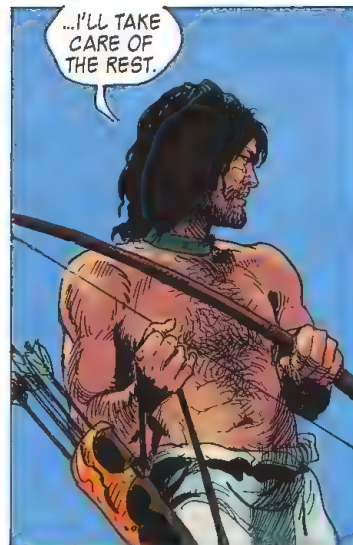
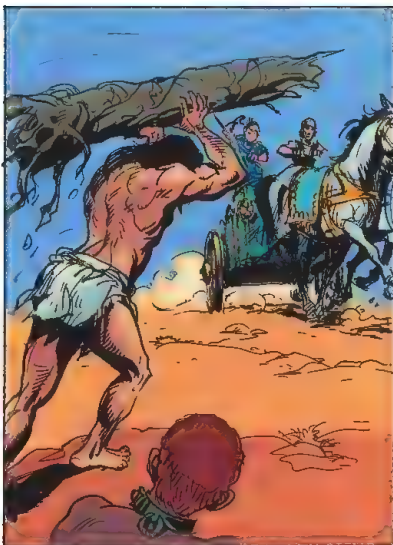
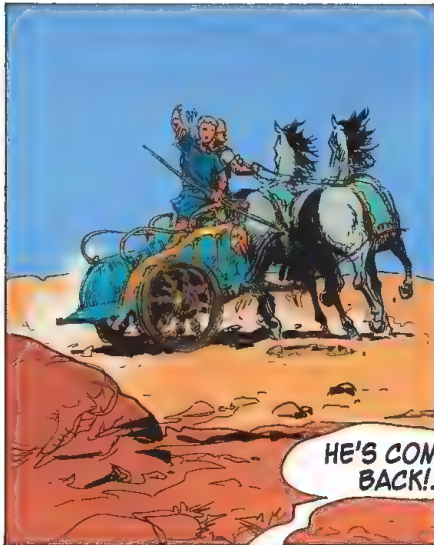


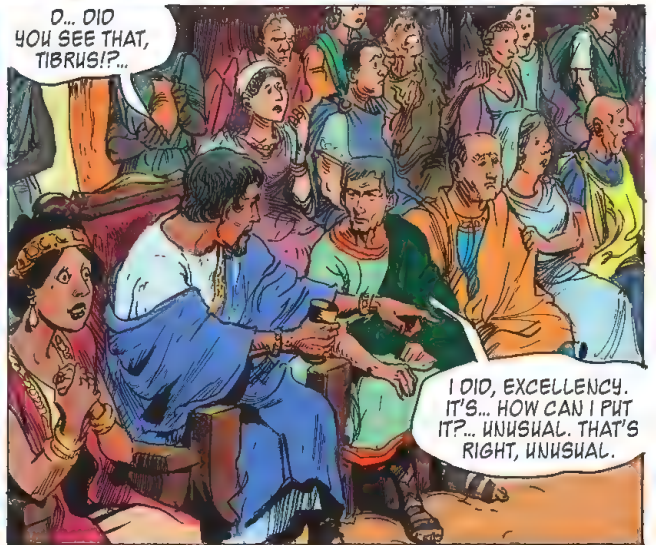
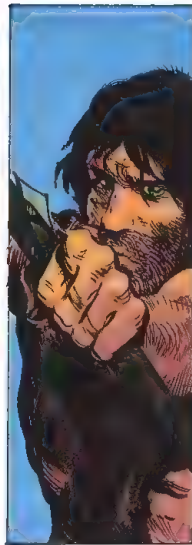
AH, THIS SHOULD
BE A FINE
DAY...

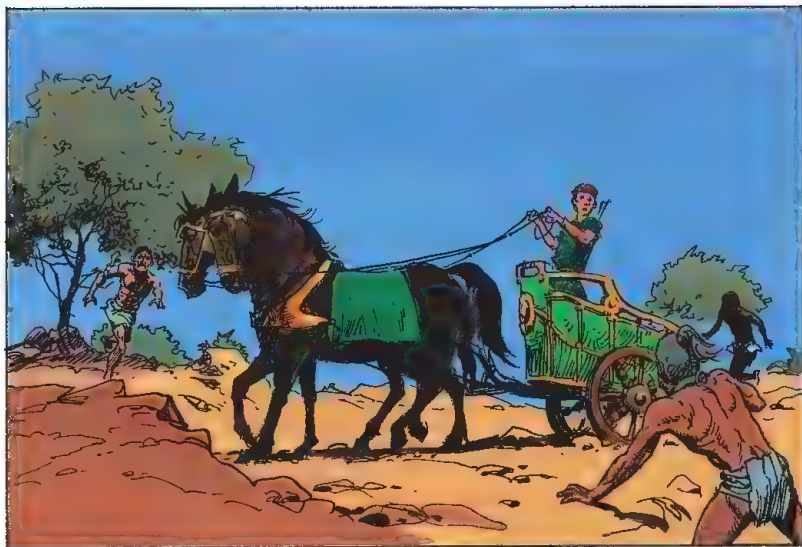


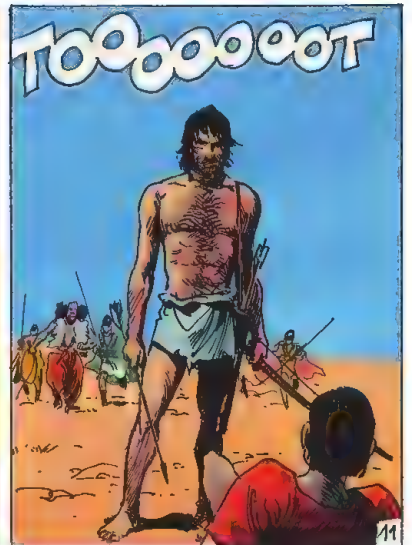
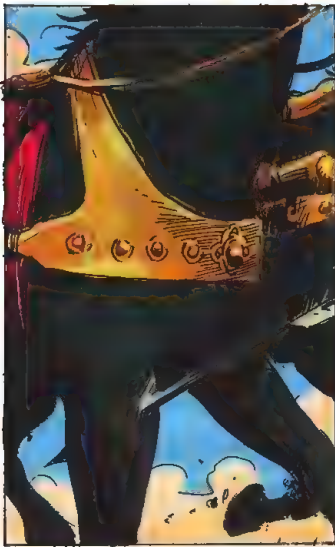
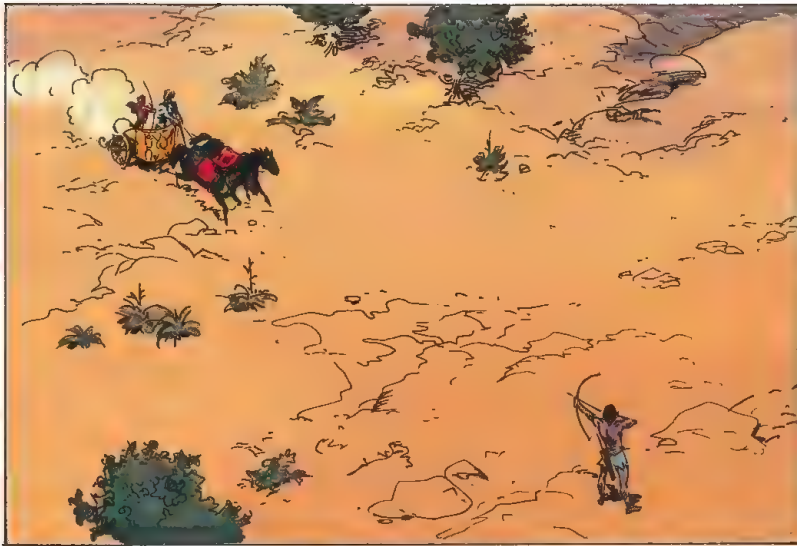


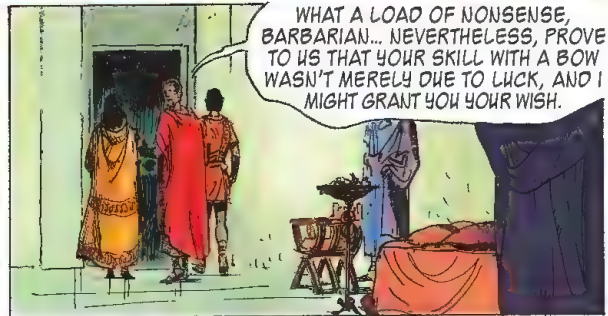
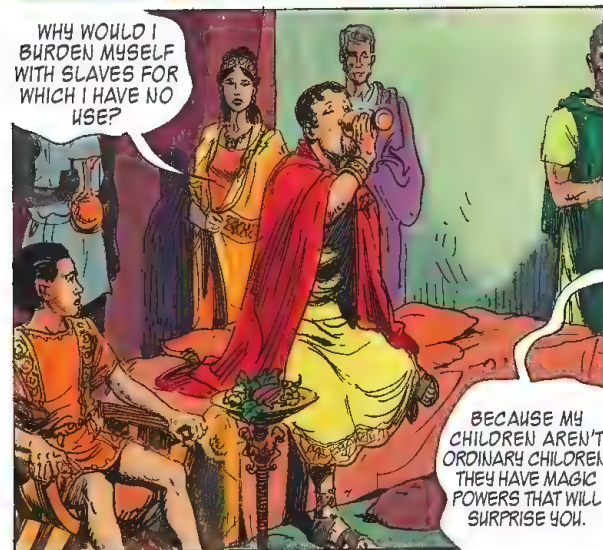


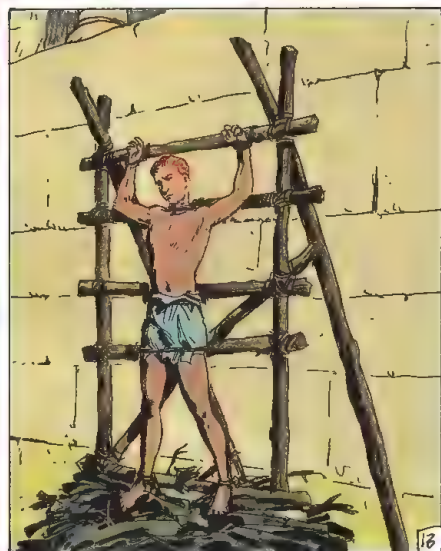
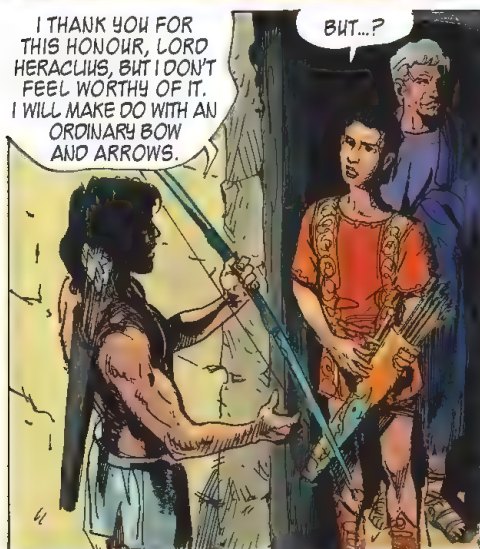


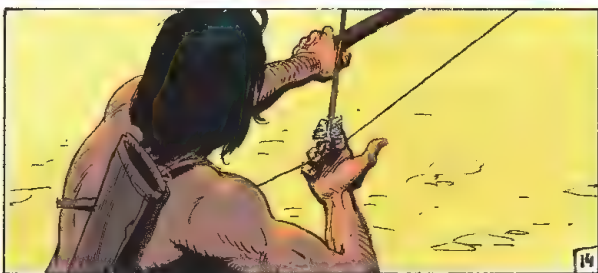
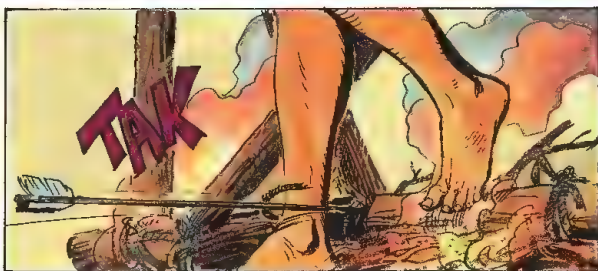
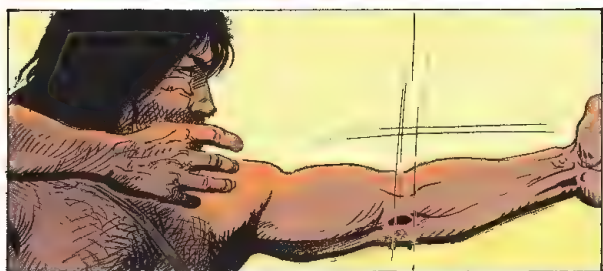
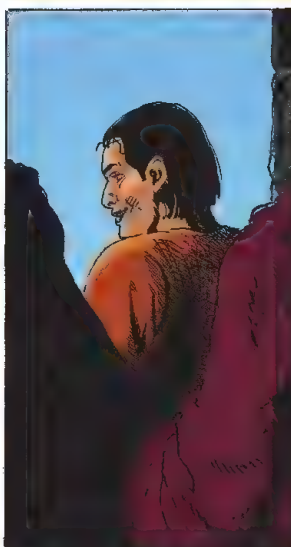
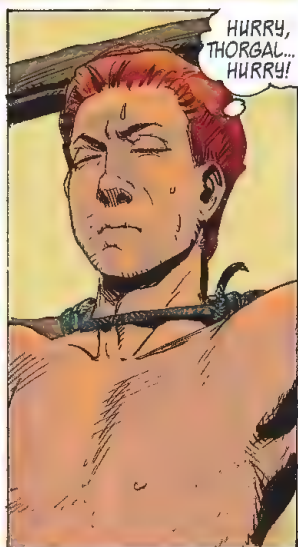
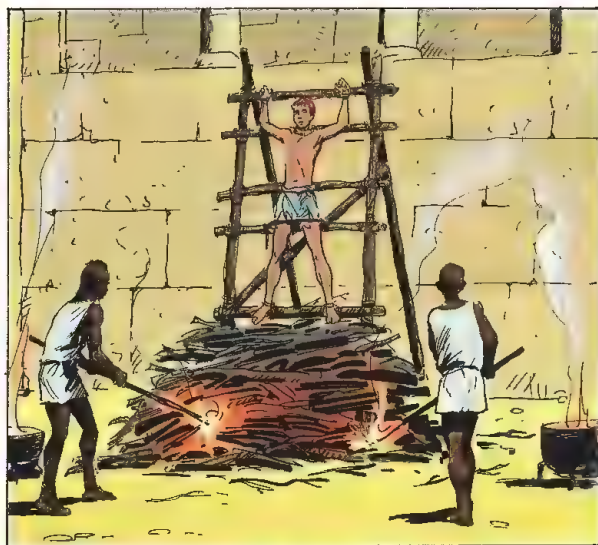


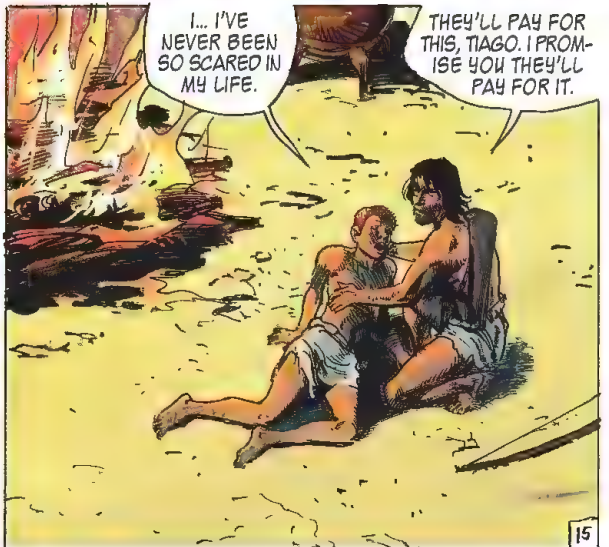
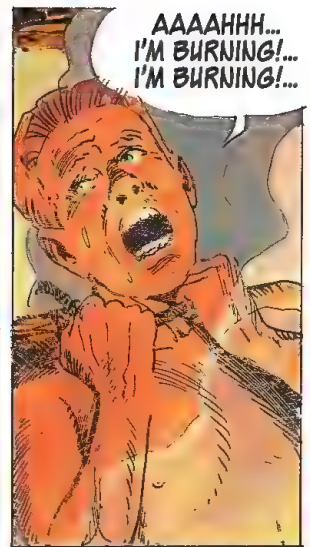
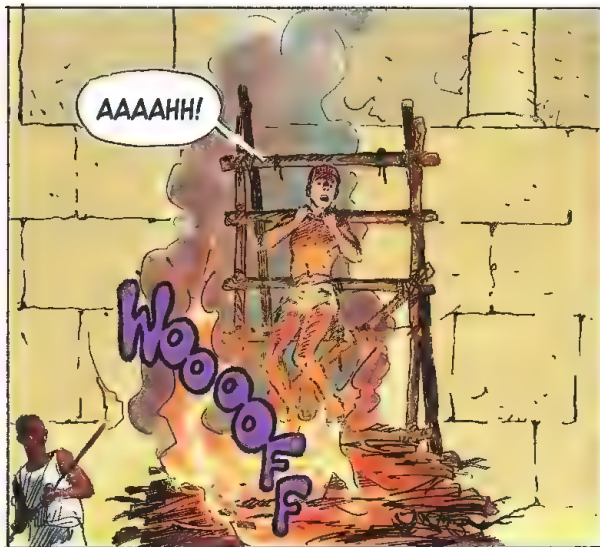


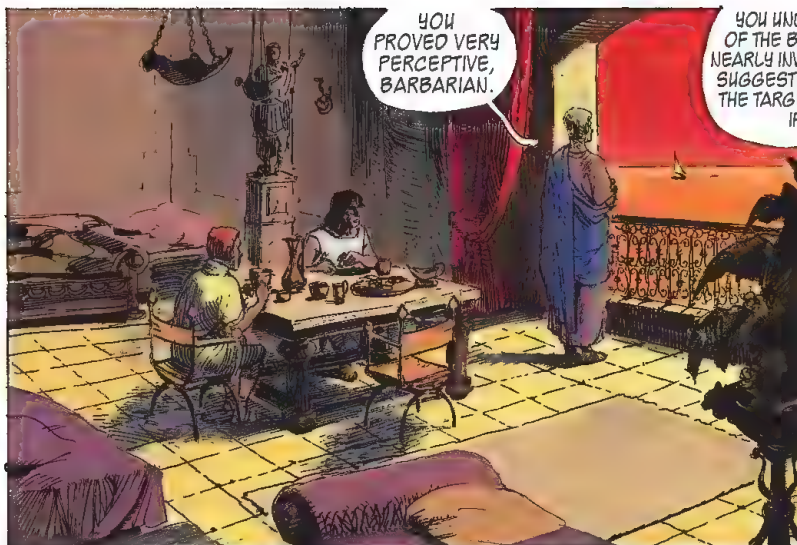






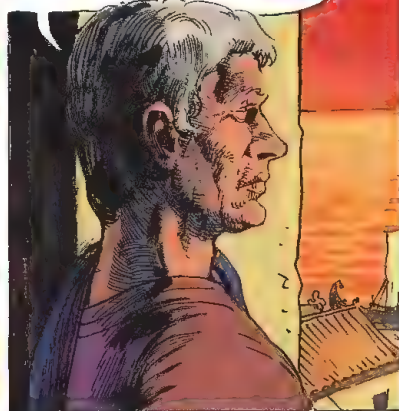






YOU PROVED VERY PERCEPTIVE, BARBARIAN.

YOU UNDERSTOOD IMMEDIATELY THAT THE WOOD OF THE BOW HERACLIUS MEANT TO GIVE YOU HAD A NEARLY INVISIBLE CRACK. HE WAS ALSO THE ONE WHO SUGGESTED TO HIS FATHER USING YOUR FRIEND AS THE TARGET. IT WILL NOT SURPRISE YOU, THEREFORE, IF I TELL YOU HE DOESN'T LIKE YOU.

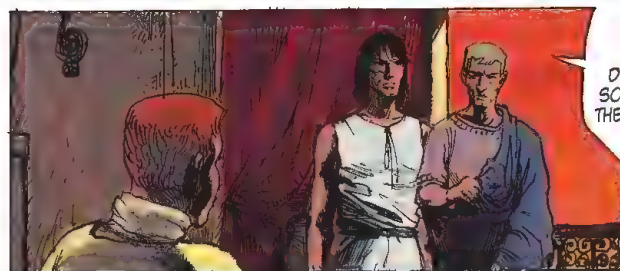


HE'S NOT THE ONLY ONE HERE WHO HATES YOU. COME AND SEE THIS...

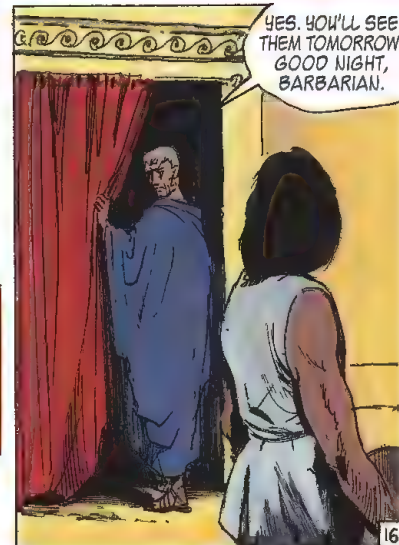


BY THE GODS! WHO ARE THOSE POOR MEN?

YOUR COMPANIONS, THOSE WHO WERE GRANTED THEIR FREEDOM BY THE GOVERNOR. AS YOU CAN SEE, THEY DIDN'T GET FAR.



THE NOBLES FROM THE COURT WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU FOR THE DEATHS OF TWO OF THEIR SONS. THEY CONSIDER YOU THE MAIN CULPRIT IN THOSE DEATHS. AT LEAST BY PLACING YOURSELF IN THE GOVERNOR'S SERVICE, YOU'RE SHIELDED FROM THEIR VENGEANCE — FOR NOW.

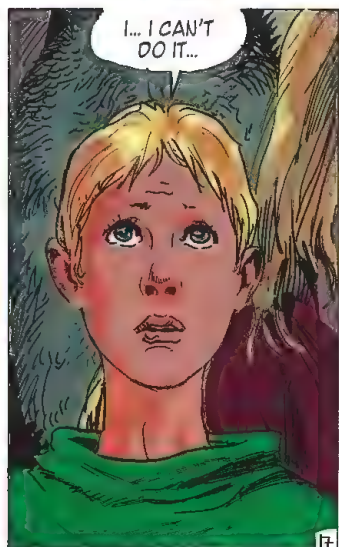
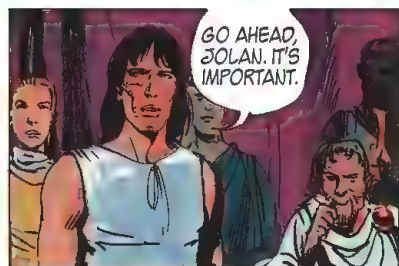
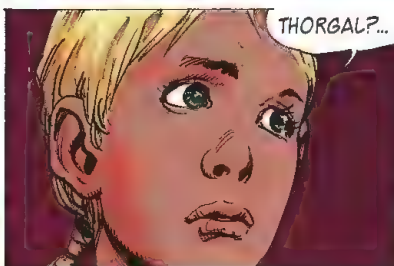
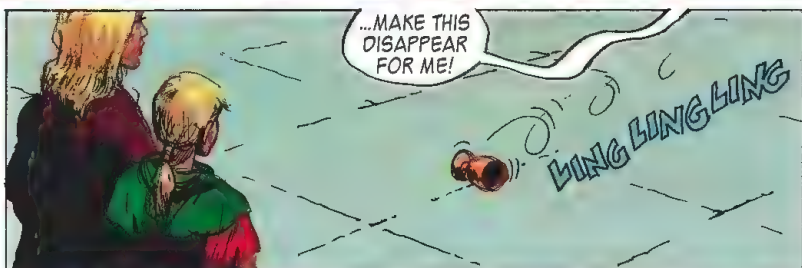


YES. YOU'LL SEE THEM TOMORROW. GOOD NIGHT, BARBARIAN.



AS LONG AS YOU AND YOUR COMPANION REMAIN UNDER HIS PROTECTION, YOU'RE SAFE. BUT IF YOU EVER LEAVE THE PALACE...

I WOULD NEVER LEAVE WITHOUT MY FAMILY ANYWAY. HAVE YOU FOUND THEM?



THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.
ENOUGH NONSENSE —
TAKE THOSE SLAVES
BACK WHERE YOU
FOUND THEM.



NO!!

HEY!...

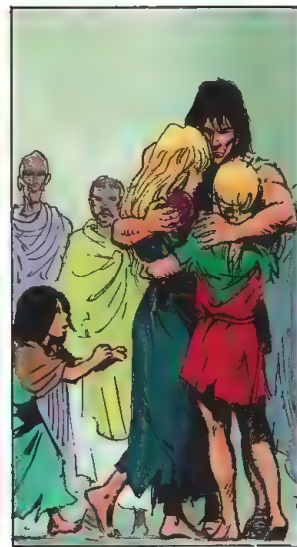
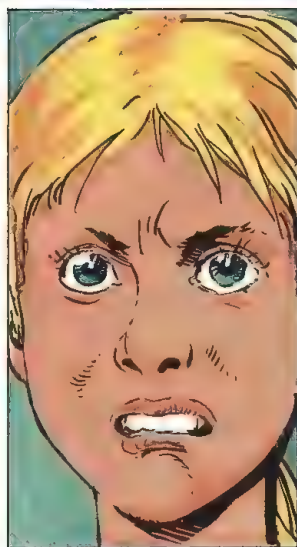
THORGAL,
DON'T LET THEM
SEPARATE US
AGAIN...



LET ME GO, YOU
THUG! I WANT TO GO
TO MY HUSBAND,
AND—



?!



DID... DID YOU SEE
THAT, TIBRUS???

I DID, EXCELLENCY. AND
I BELIEVE I UNDERSTAND,
TOO. THAT BOY DOES
HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE
OBJECTS DISAPPEAR BUT
ONLY WHEN SEIZED BY
A STRONG EMOTION.



THAT WASN'T BAD,
BARBARIAN. SO, WHAT
DOES YOUR LITTLE
GIRL DO? DOES
SHE FLY?

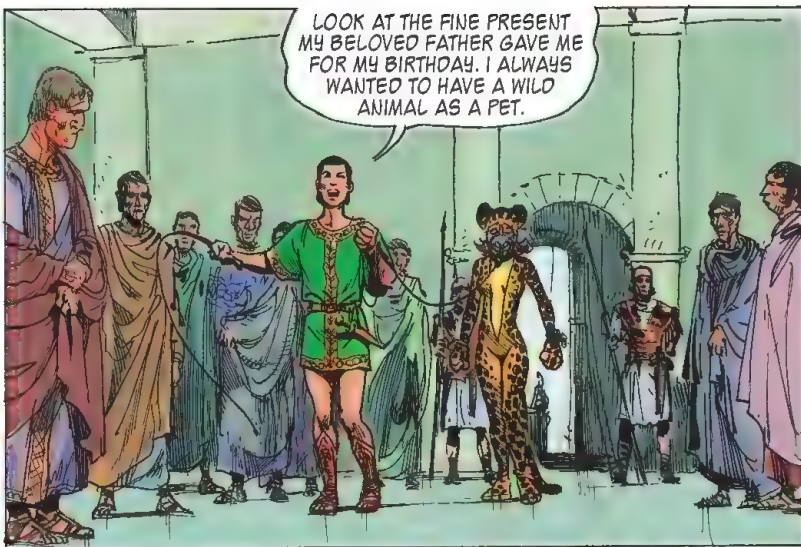
ONE
MOMENT...

FORGIVE ME, LORD, BUT WHERE IS MY SISTER? YOU PROMISED TO BUY HER BACK TOO. WHERE IS ILENIYA?



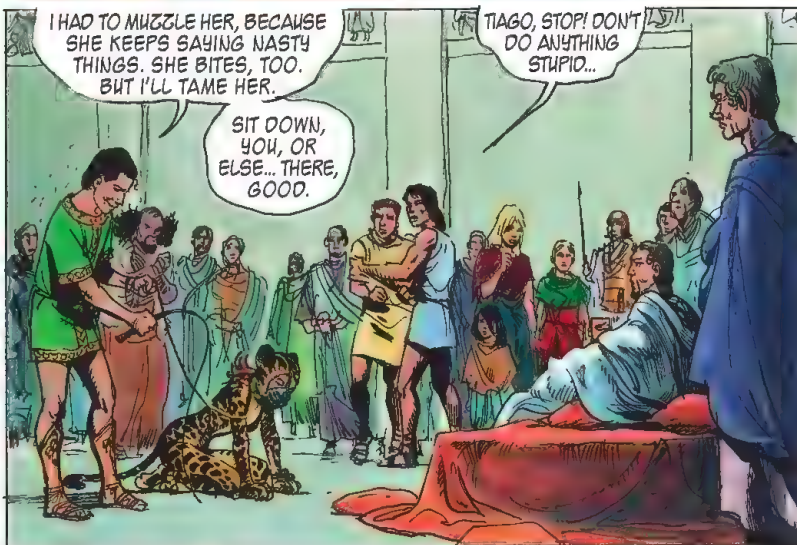
HERE.

LOOK AT THE FINE PRESENT MY BELOVED FATHER GAVE ME FOR MY BIRTHDAY. I ALWAYS WANTED TO HAVE A WILD ANIMAL AS A PET.

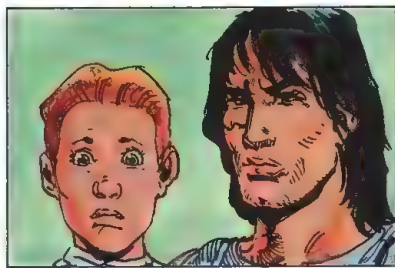
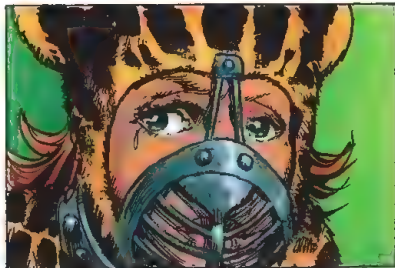


I HAD TO MUZZLE HER, BECAUSE SHE KEEPS SAYING NASTY THINGS. SHE BITES, TOO. BUT I'LL TAME HER.

SIT DOWN, YOU, OR ELSE... THERE, GOOD.



TIAGO, STOP! DON'T DO ANYTHING STUPID...

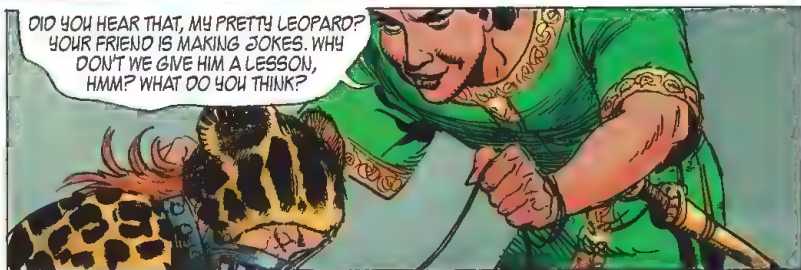


WELL, BARBARIAN, WHAT SORCERY WILL THAT LITTLE WILD CHILD OF YOURS ENTERTAIN US WITH?

SOMETHING THAT SHOULD BE TO YOUR TASTE, LORD HERACLIUS: SHE CAN CONVERSE WITH ANIMALS.

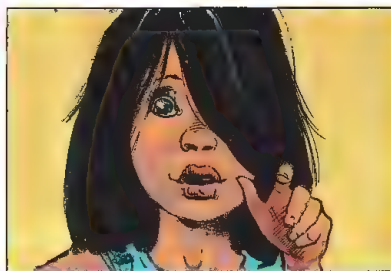
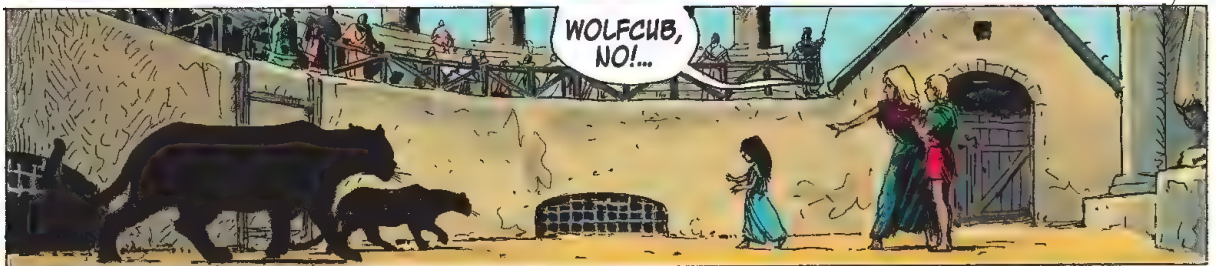
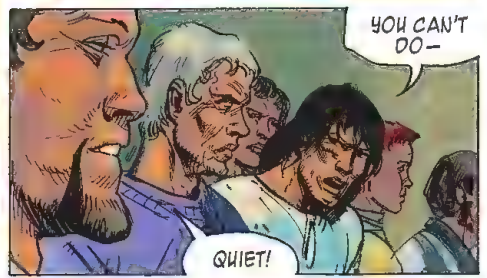
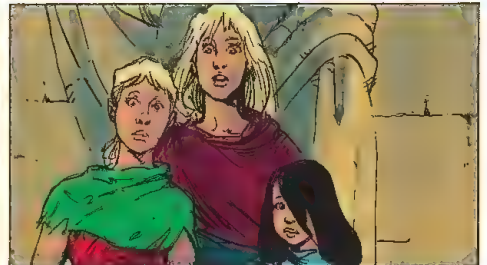
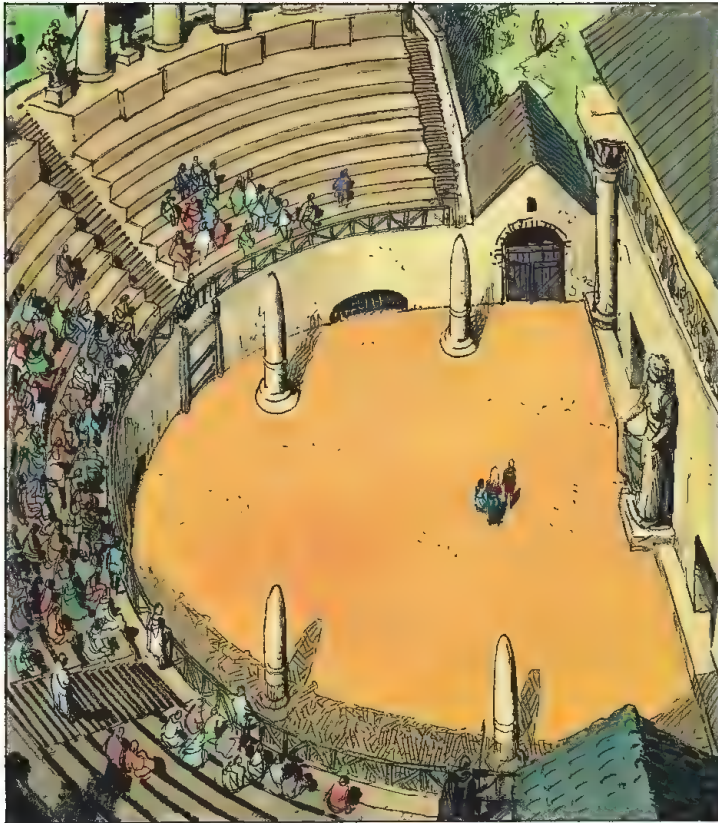


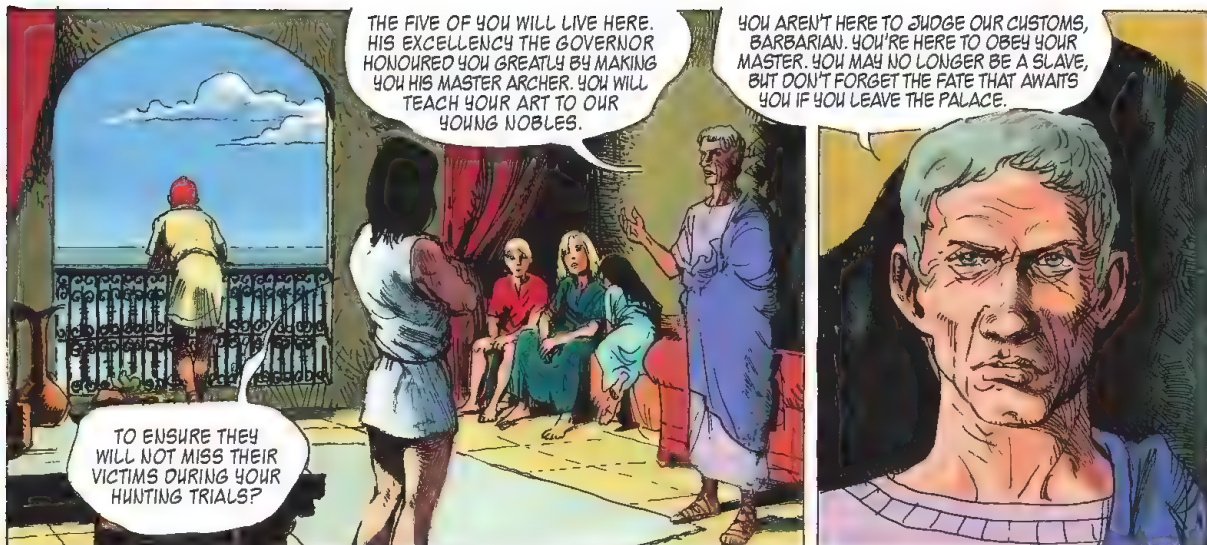
DID YOU HEAR THAT, MY PRETTY LEOPARD? YOUR FRIEND IS MAKING JOKES. WHY DON'T WE GIVE HIM A LESSON, HMM? WHAT DO YOU THINK?



AH... AN EXCELLENT IDEA, MY BOY. IT COULD PROVE AMUSING.

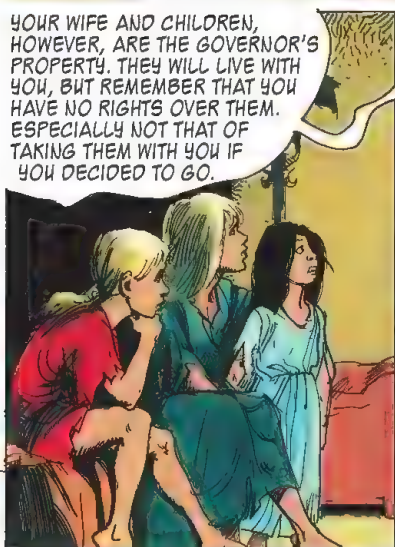






THE FIVE OF YOU WILL LIVE HERE. HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR HONOURED YOU GREATLY BY MAKING YOU HIS MASTER ARCHER. YOU WILL TEACH YOUR ART TO OUR YOUNG NOBLES.

YOU AREN'T HERE TO JUDGE OUR CUSTOMS, BARBARIAN. YOU'RE HERE TO OBEY YOUR MASTER. YOU MAY NO LONGER BE A SLAVE, BUT DON'T FORGET THE FATE THAT AWAITS YOU IF YOU LEAVE THE PALACE.



YOUR WIFE AND CHILDREN, HOWEVER, ARE THE GOVERNOR'S PROPERTY. THEY WILL LIVE WITH YOU, BUT REMEMBER THAT YOU HAVE NO RIGHTS OVER THEM. ESPECIALLY NOT THAT OF TAKING THEM WITH YOU IF YOU DECIDED TO GO.



AND TIAGO?

I DON'T KNOW. THE GOVERNOR DIDN'T GIVE ME ANY INSTRUCTIONS FOR HIM.

WITH YOUR PERMISSION, HE'LL BE MY ASSISTANT.



AS YOU WISH. I'LL HAVE CLOTHES AND FOOD BROUGHT TO YOU, AS WELL AS WATER TO WASH.



ALL IN ALL, WE'RE NOT DOING TOO BADLY. WE SHOULD HAVE DIED IN THE DESERT*, YET WE'RE ALIVE. TIAGO AND I ARE FREE MEN AGAIN, OR NEAR AS CAN BE. AND YOU, MY LOVE, AND OUR CHILDREN, ARE SAFE HERE FOR NOW.

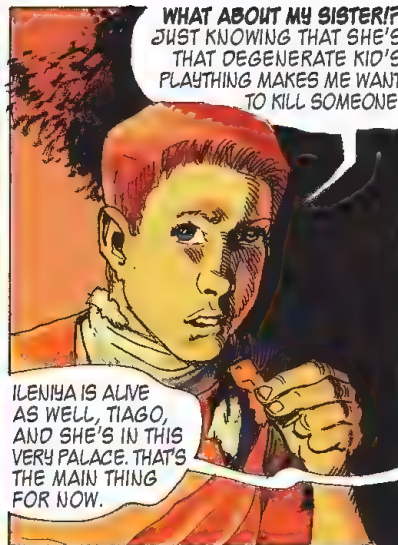
OH, YOU ACTUALLY THINK WE'RE DOING WELL, DO YOU?!



*SEE PREVIOUS VOLUME.

WHAT ABOUT MY SISTER? JUST KNOWING THAT SHE'S THAT DEGENERATE KID'S PLAYTHING MAKES ME WANT TO KILL SOMEONE.

ILENIYA IS ALIVE AS WELL, TIAGO, AND SHE'S IN THIS VERY PALACE. THAT'S THE MAIN THING FOR NOW.



THE STEWARD APPEARS WELL-INCLINED TOWARDS US. I WILL TRY TO GET HIM TO MAKE SURE HERACLIUS DOESN'T MISTREAT YOUR SISTER TOO BADLY. UNTIL WE FIND A WAY TO LEAVE THIS CITY AND THIS LAND ALL TOGETHER.



LEAVE HERE? HA!... I DON'T SEE HOW.

BY BEING OBSERVANT, AND PATIENT. WE'RE IN A PORT. AND A PORT OFFERS MORE POSSIBILITIES OF ESCAPE THAN ANY OTHER PLACE.



YOUR WORLD IS A GRIM PLACE, THORGAL, WHERE THE WORST ENEMY OF MAN ... IS MAN HIMSELF.

THIS IS THE WORLD THAT AARICIA AND I TRIED TO ESCAPE. UNFORTUNATELY, NO MATTER HOW FAR WE GO, IT KEEPS CATCHING UP TO US.



YOU WERE WONDERFUL, CHILDREN. WE WOULDN'T BE HERE TOGETHER IF NOT FOR YOU.

I'D ALMOST LOST HOPE WE'D EVER BE TOGETHER AGAIN. DO YOU REMEMBER THE PROMISE YOU MADE ME?

YES, AARICIA. AS SOON AS WE CAN, WE'LL RETURN TO NORTHLAND, AND OUR WANDERING DAYS WILL BE OVER FOR GOOD.



EXCEPT I NEARLY RUINED EVERYTHING. BUT YOU'LL SEE; ONE DAY I'LL LEARN HOW TO BETTER CONTROL MY POWERS. I'LL BE AS STRONG AS MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER TANATLOC.

IT WAS EASY FOR ME. THOSE BIG BLACK CATS WEREN'T VERY HUNGRY, FORTUNATELY.



22



IN ORDER TO LEARN HOW TO AIM, START BY PLACING YOUR FINGERS ON THE STRING, A HAND'S WIDTH BELOW THE ARROW'S NOCK.



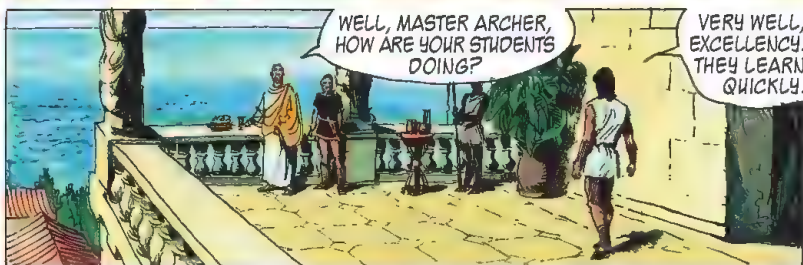
YES, GOOD. THEN YOU AIM AT THE TARGET BY SIGHTING ALONG THE LENGTH OF YOUR ARROW.

MASTER THORGAL...



...HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR WANTS TO SEE YOU.

ALL RIGHT, I'M COMING. TIAGO, CONTINUE WITH THE LESSON, PLEASE.



WELL, MASTER ARCHER, HOW ARE YOUR STUDENTS DOING?

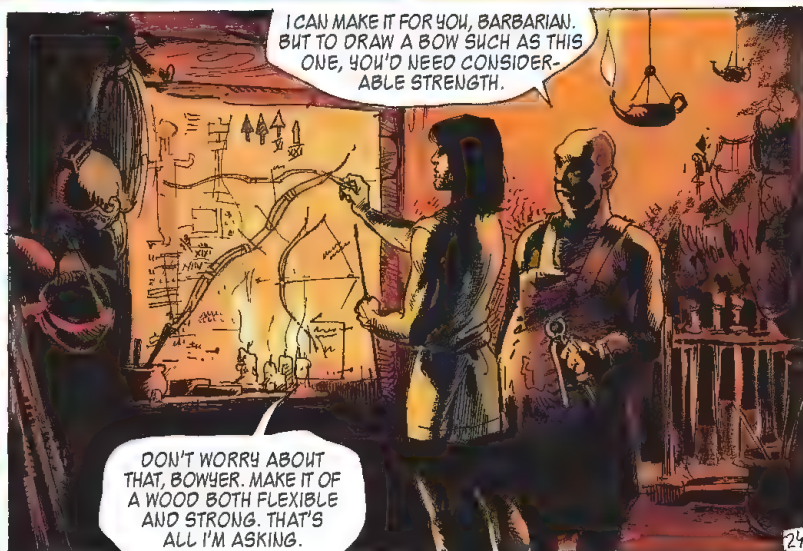
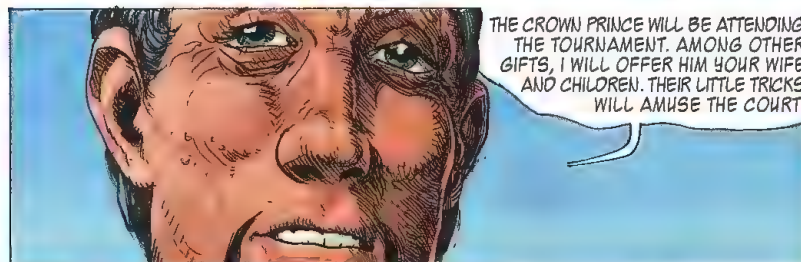
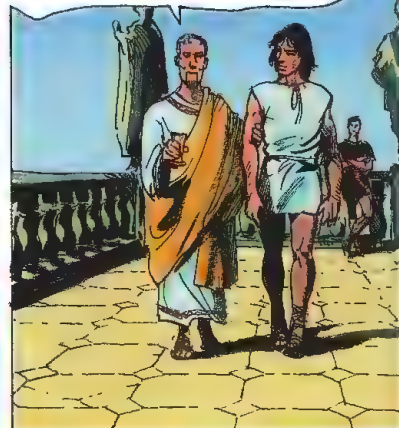
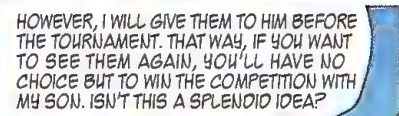
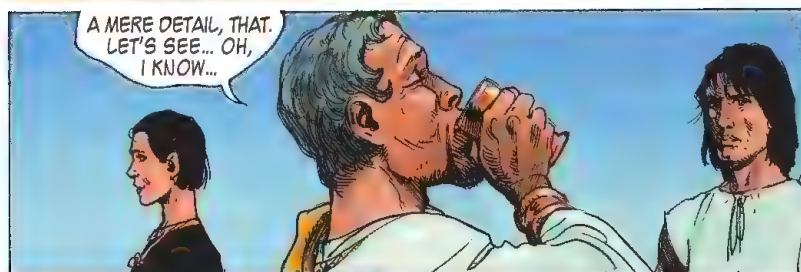
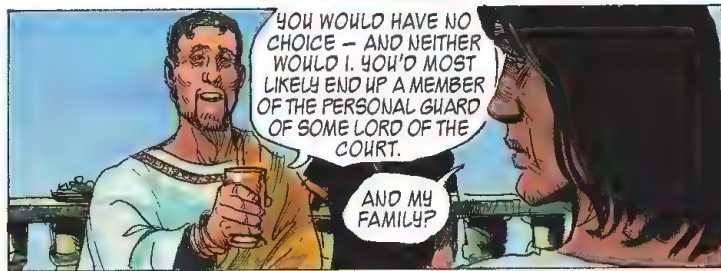
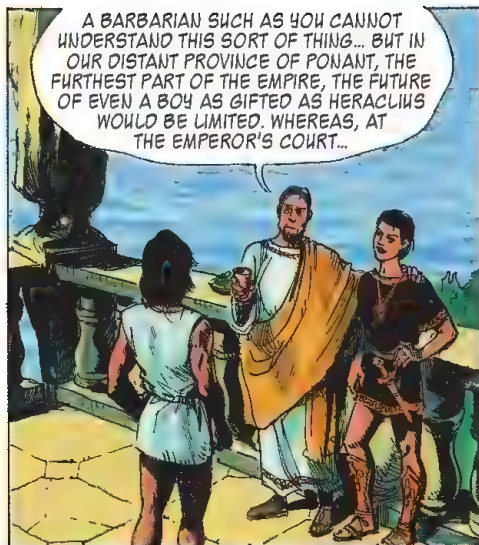
VERY WELL, EXCELLENCY. THEY LEARN QUICKLY.

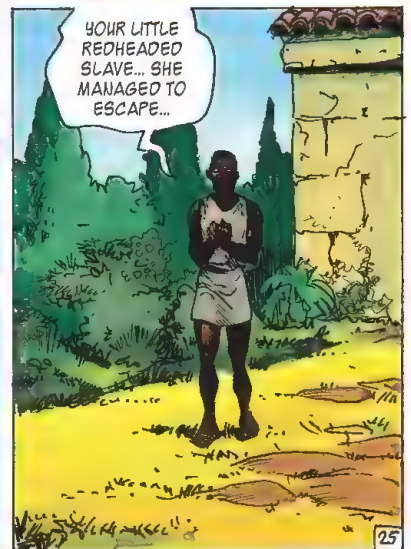
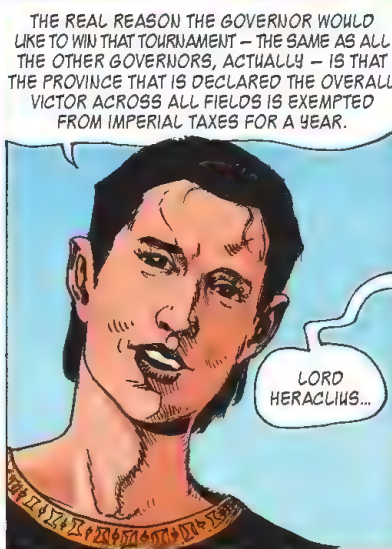
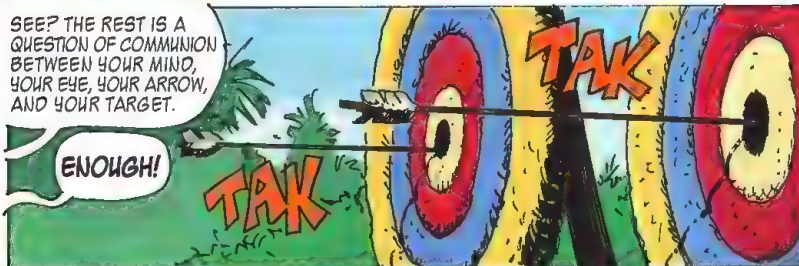
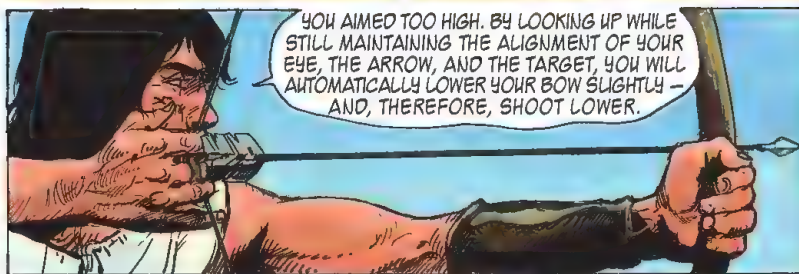
GOOD, GOOD. THAT'S NOT WHY I SUMMONED YOU, THOUGH. IN A MONTH, AS HAPPENS EVERY FIVE YEARS, THE GREAT MARTIAL TOURNAMENT AMONG THE TEN PROVINCES OF THE EMPIRE WILL TAKE PLACE ON THE ISLAND OF SYRENIA. CHARIOT RACES, WRESTLING, SWORD FIGHTS, AND ABOVE ALL, AN ARCHERY COMPETITION — WITH EACH PROVINCE SENDING TWO ATHLETES FOR EACH DISCIPLINE.



THE TWO WINNERS IN EACH FIELD WILL GO TO SERVE THE EMPEROR, WHICH IS A GREAT HONOUR. THEREFORE, I'VE DECIDED THAT FOR THE ARCHERY TOURNAMENT, YOU WILL TEAM UP WITH MY SON HERACLIUS.

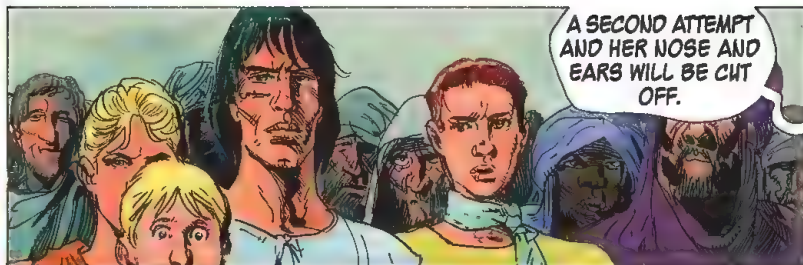




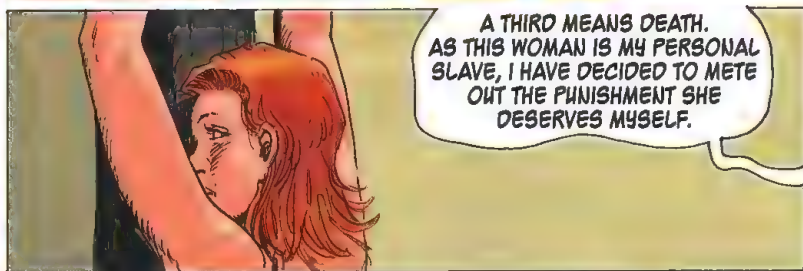




YOU KNOW THE LAW. IF A SLAVE ATTEMPTS TO RUN AWAY, THE PENALTY IS 50 LASHES FOR A MAN, 30 FOR A WOMAN.



A SECOND ATTEMPT AND HER NOSE AND EARS WILL BE CUT OFF.



A THIRD MEANS DEATH. AS THIS WOMAN IS MY PERSONAL SLAVE, I HAVE DECIDED TO METE OUT THE PUNISHMENT SHE DESERVES MYSELF.



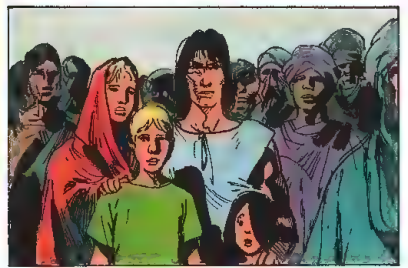
DON'T, TIAGO. THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO.



THIS TIME YOU SCREAM, YOU LITTLE VIXEN!

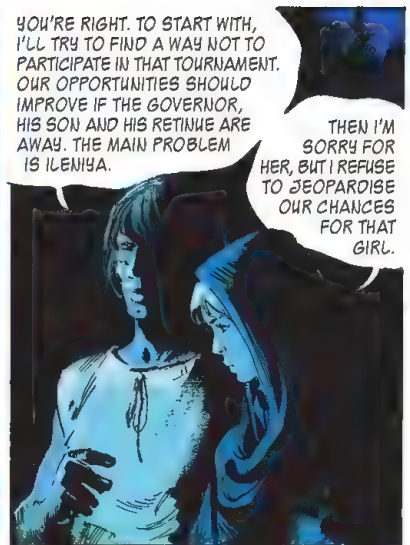


TIAGO, NO!...





IT'S HORRIBLE! POOR TIAGO... WE HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO ESCAPE FROM HERE. IT WILL PROBABLY BE MUCH MORE DIFFICULT LATER, ONCE WE'RE AT THE COURT OF THAT EMPEROR.



YOU'RE RIGHT. TO START WITH, I'LL TRY TO FIND A WAY NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THAT TOURNAMENT. OUR OPPORTUNITIES SHOULD IMPROVE IF THE GOVERNOR, HIS SON AND HIS RETINUE ARE AWAY. THE MAIN PROBLEM IS ILENIYA.

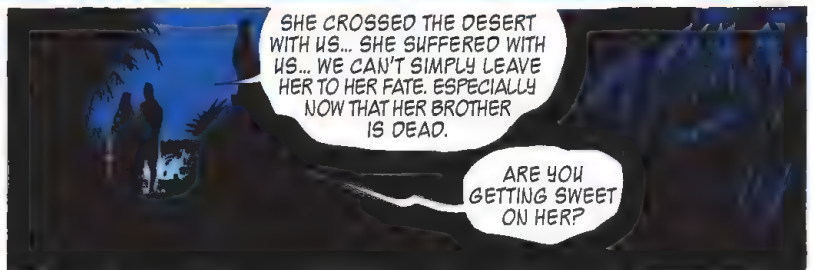
THEN I'M SORRY FOR HER, BUT I REFUSE TO JEOPARDISE OUR CHANCES FOR THAT GIRL.



ILENIYA IS ONE OF MY PEOPLE, AARICIA. SHE HELPED US IN THE CITY BENEATH THE SAND, AND HER FIANCE SACRIFICED HIMSELF TO SAVE US.*

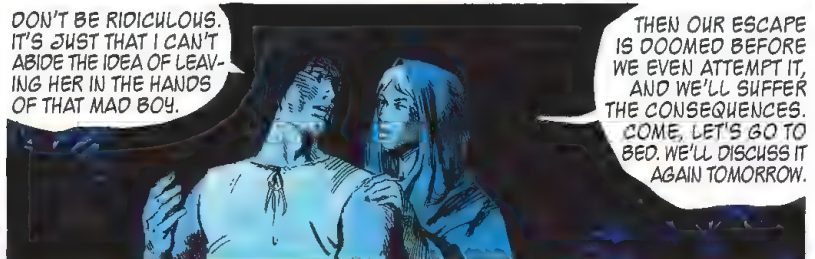
THAT IS TRUE. BUT RIGHT NOW SHE'S HALF DEAD AND UNDER CLOSE GUARD BY THAT MONSTER'S HENCHMEN. MAKING OUR OWN ESCAPE WITH THE CHILDREN WILL BE DIFFICULT ENOUGH AS IT IS.

*SEE PREVIOUS VOLUME.



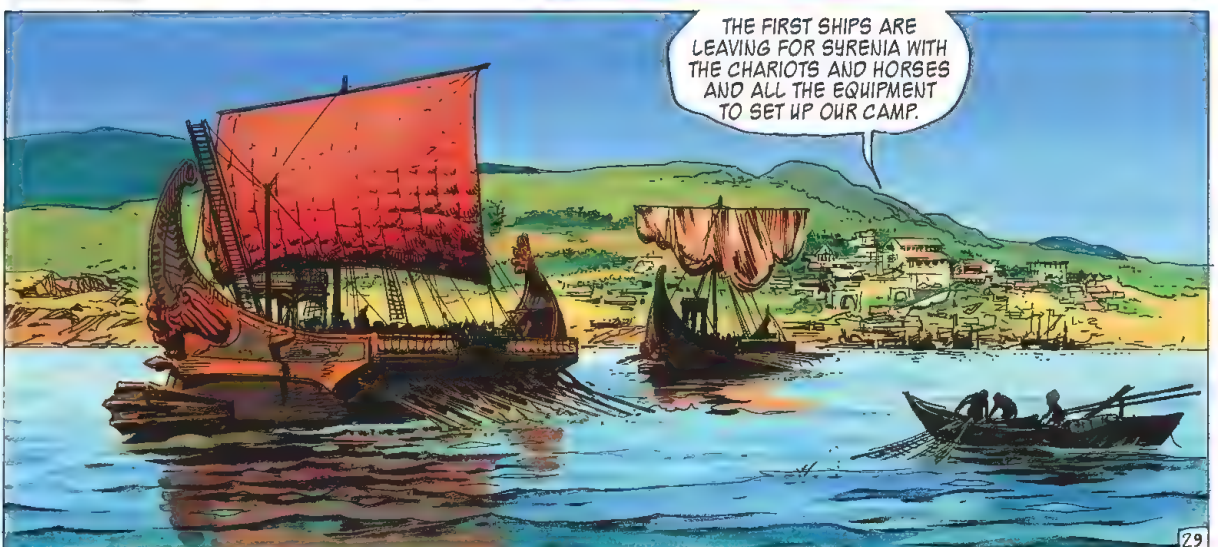
SHE CROSSED THE DESERT WITH US... SHE SUFFERED WITH US... WE CAN'T SIMPLY LEAVE HER TO HER FATE. ESPECIALLY NOW THAT HER BROTHER IS DEAD.

ARE YOU GETTING SWEET ON HER?



DON'T BE RIDICULOUS. IT'S JUST THAT I CAN'T ABIDE THE IDEA OF LEAVING HER IN THE HANDS OF THAT MAD BOY.

THEN OUR ESCAPE IS DOOMED BEFORE WE EVEN ATTEMPT IT, AND WE'LL SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES. COME, LET'S GO TO BED. WE'LL DISCUSS IT AGAIN TOMORROW.



THE FIRST SHIPS ARE LEAVING FOR SYRENIA WITH THE CHARIOTS AND HORSES AND ALL THE EQUIPMENT TO SET UP OUR CAMP.

THE COURT AND THE ATHLETES WILL FOLLOW IN TWO DAYS. THE WEATHER PROMISES TO BE FAIR. THIS TOURNAMENT WILL BE A FINE CELEBRATION, MASTER THORGAL.

SPEAKING OF THE TOURNAMENT, EXCELLENCY...



YOU NO LONGER WANT TO BE PARTNERED WITH HERACLIUS, IS THAT IT? BECAUSE HE KILLED YOUR FRIEND AND WHIPPED THAT POOR GIRL HALF TO DEATH?

THAT... ER... THAT'S EXACTLY IT, EXCELLENCY.

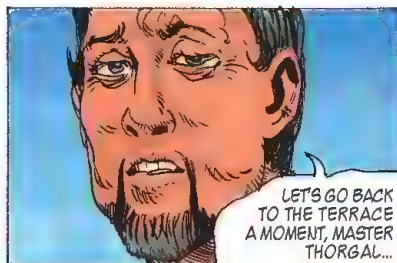
LET ME TELL YOU A SECRET, BARBARIAN. I DON'T LIKE MY SON. HE'S A CRUEL, PRIDEFUL AND CLOSE-MINDED BRUTE AND CONFUSES THE EXERCISE OF POWER WITH DESPOTISM. IT'S PROBABLY MY FAULT. I DIDN'T RAISE HIM WELL.



AT THE EMPEROR'S COURT HE'LL HAVE TO FACE COURTIER'S EVEN WORSE THAN HE IS. HIS FLAWS AND VICES WILL BECOME HIS BEST WEAPONS, AND HE'LL THRIVE THERE, LIKE A CROCODILE IN A MUDDY RIVER.



PERFECT. THANK YOU, TIBRUS.

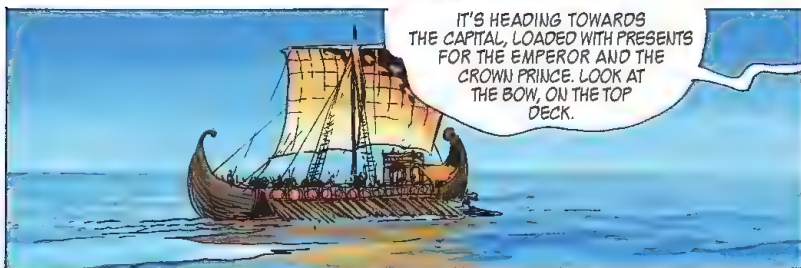


LET'S GO BACK TO THE TERRACE A MOMENT, MASTER THORGAL...



YOU HAVE KEEN EYES. DO YOU SEE THAT GALLEY SAILING NORTH-EAST FROM THE HARBOUR?

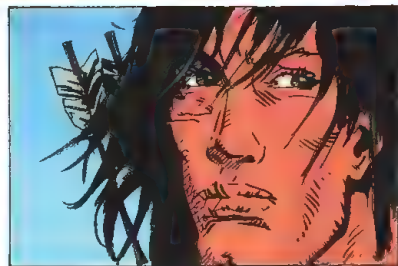
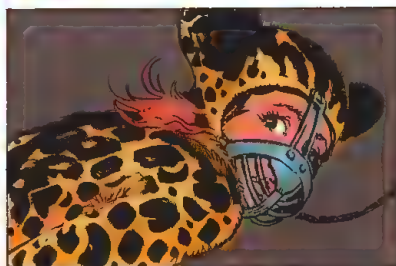
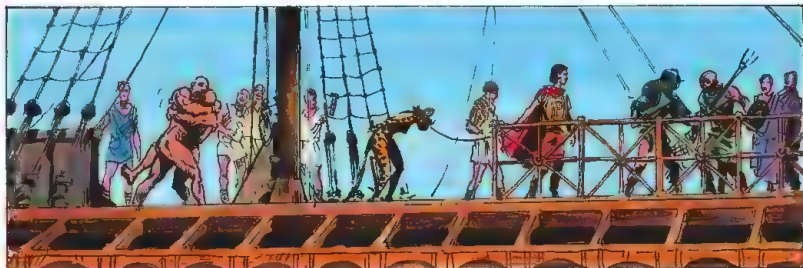
YES.



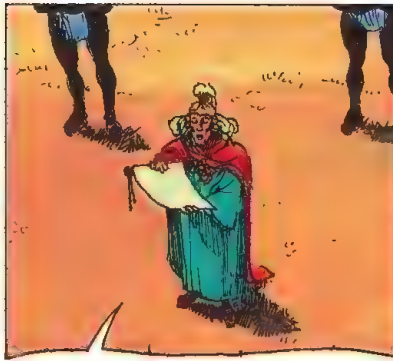
IT'S HEADING TOWARDS THE CAPITAL, LOADED WITH PRESENTS FOR THE EMPEROR AND THE CROWN PRINCE. LOOK AT THE BOW, ON THE TOP DECK.



YOUR REACTION WAS COMPLETELY PREDICTABLE, BARBARIAN. IF YOU EVER WANT TO SEE YOUR FAMILY AGAIN, YOU HAVE NO CHOICE LEFT BUT TO WIN THE ARCHERY TOURNAMENT WITH HERACLIUS!

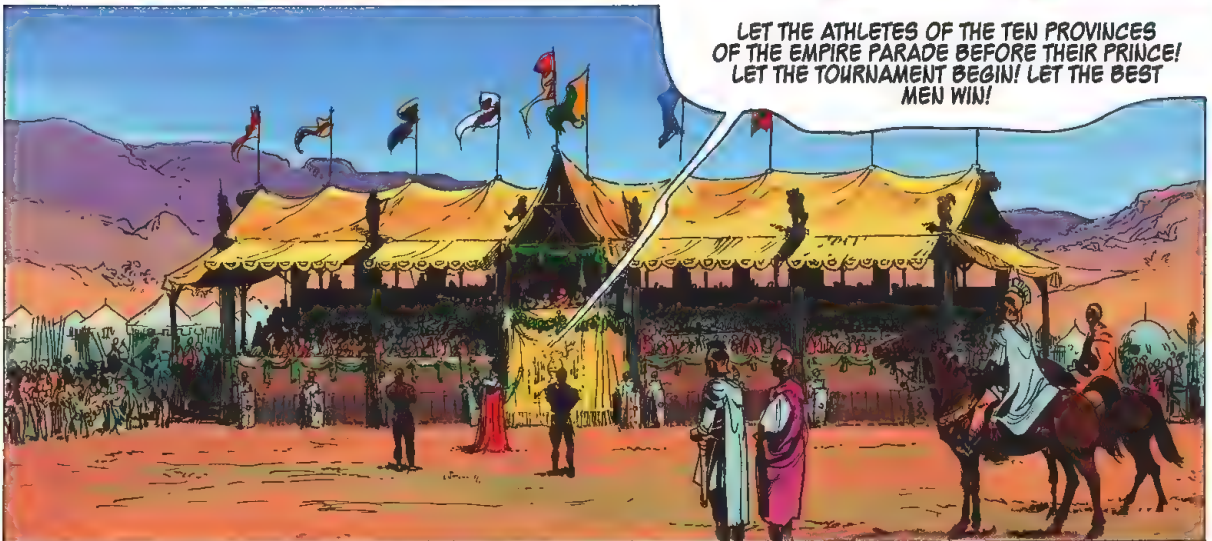


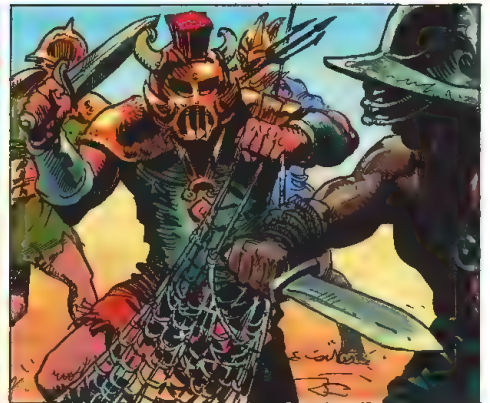
THE TOURNAMENT OF THE TEN PROVINCES WILL RUN OVER THREE DAYS OF TRIALS IN FOUR DISCIPLINES: CHARIOT RACING, WRESTLING, SWORD FIGHTING AND ARCHERY. EACH PROVINCE CAN ONLY FIELD TWO ATHLETES PER DISCIPLINE, WITH NO REPLACEMENTS ALLOWED.

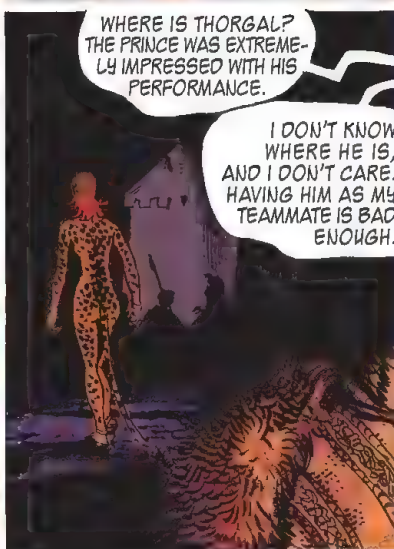
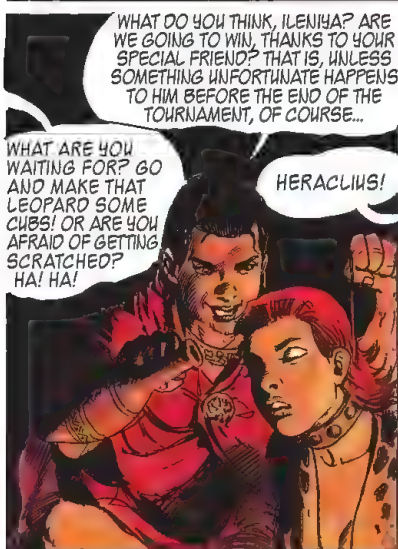


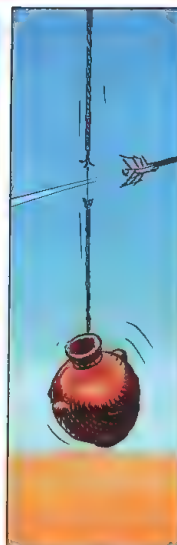
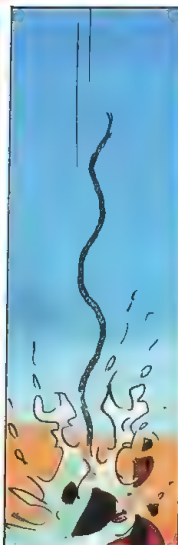
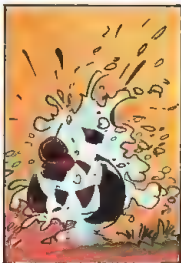
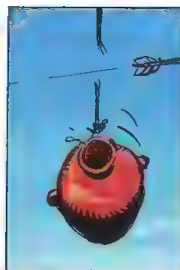
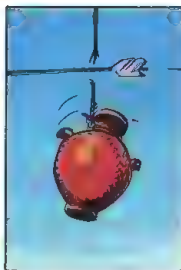
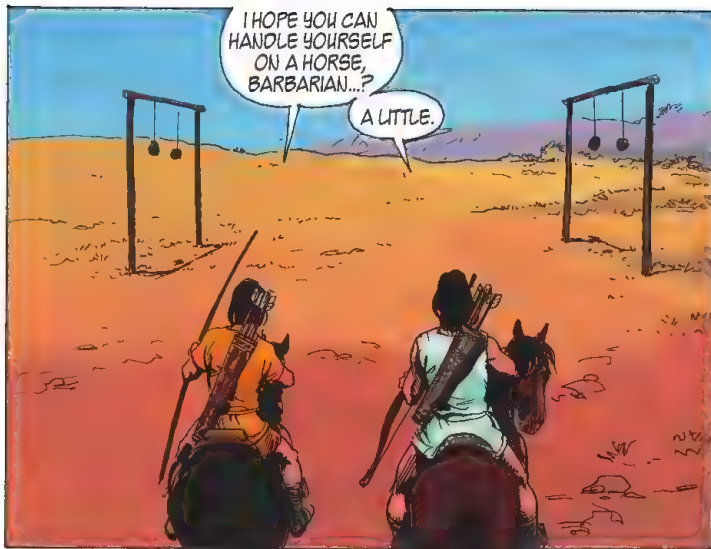
AT THE END OF THE FIRST DAY, THE THREE PROVINCES WITH THE LOWEST COMBINED RESULTS IN ALL FOUR DISCIPLINES WILL BE ELIMINATED, AND AGAIN ON THE SECOND DAY. ON THE THIRD AND LAST DAY, THE FOUR REMAINING PROVINCES WILL COMPETE FOR THE CROWN.

THE WINNING PROVINCE WILL BE THE ONE THAT TRIUMPHS IN THE MOST TRIALS ON THAT LAST DAY. IN CASE OF A DRAW, A FINAL TRIAL WILL BE PICKED RANDOMLY TO DETERMINE THE WINNERS.









AT THE END OF THIS SECOND DAY, THE PROVINCES OF PONT, THRACE, PONTUS AND ANATOLIA ARE STILL IN THE RUNNING. MAY THE HEAVENS GIVE VICTORY TO THE BEST OF THEM!



WELL DONE, HERACLIUS! THANKS TO YOU, WE'VE KEPT OUR LEAD.

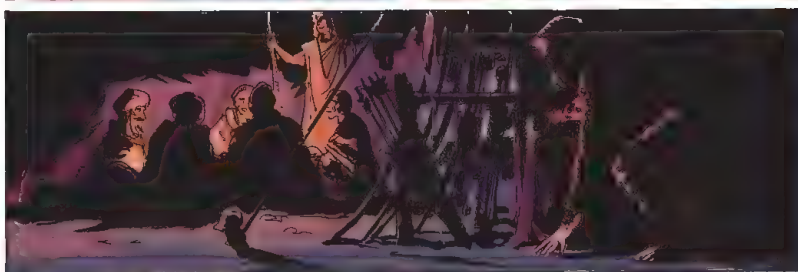


I CARE NOTHING FOR YOUR COMPLIMENTS, BARBARIAN.

ILENIYA!... ILENIYA!... WHERE ARE YOU, YOU LITTLE VIXEN!?



I SHOULD NEVER HAVE OBEYED MY FATHER AND UNTIED HER. AS SOON AS I FIND HER, I'LL WHIP THE SOLES OF HER FEET BLOODY - THAT'LL TEACH HER.



ARE YOU THE BARBARIAN THEY CALL THORGAL?



I AM. AND WHO ARE YOU?

MY NAME WOULD MEAN NOTHING TO YOU. MAY I SIT WITH YOU A MOMENT?



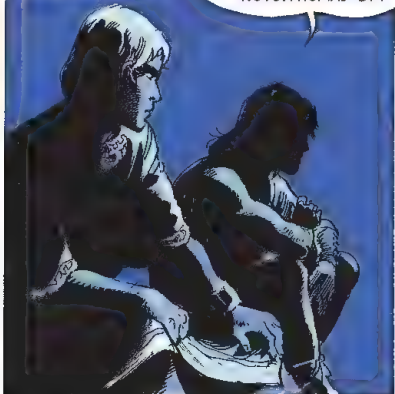
YOUR GOVERNOR TOLD ME ABOUT YOU. IT SEEMS YOU'RE NOT ONLY A REMARKABLE ARCHER BUT ALSO A BRAVE AND WISE MAN. WHERE DO YOU HAIL FROM?



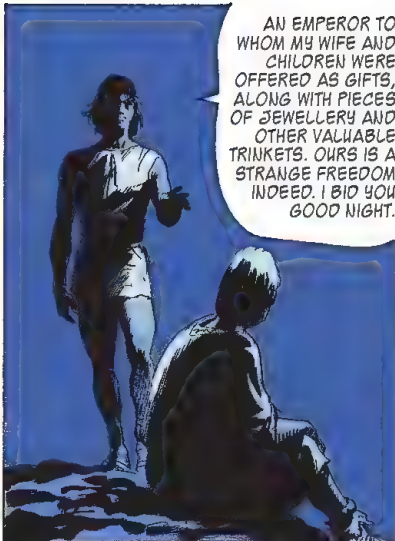
FAR AWAY. TOO FAR AWAY. I HAVE TRAVELLED KNOWN AND UNKNOWN LANDS WITH MY FAMILY, CHASING A DREAM OF FREEDOM. BUT ALL I EVER FOUND WERE MISERY, HATRED AND TYRANNY. AS IF MAN HAD BEEN CURSED BY THE VERY GODS WHO CREATED HIM.

YOU WERE SOLD AS A SLAVE, BUT YOU ARE A FREE MAN ONCE MORE.

FREE TO DO WHAT? PARTICIPATE IN A TOURNAMENT I CARE NOTHING ABOUT! THEN JOIN THE SERVICE OF AN EMPEROR I HAVE NEVER HEARD OF!



AN EMPEROR TO WHOM MY WIFE AND CHILDREN WERE OFFERED AS GIFTS, ALONG WITH PIECES OF JEWELLERY AND OTHER VALUABLE TRINKETS. OURS IS A STRANGE FREEDOM INDEED. I BID YOU GOOD NIGHT.

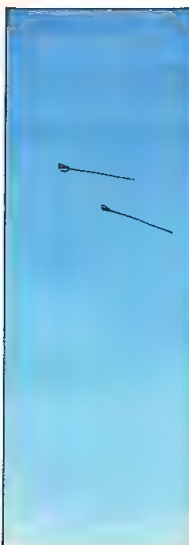
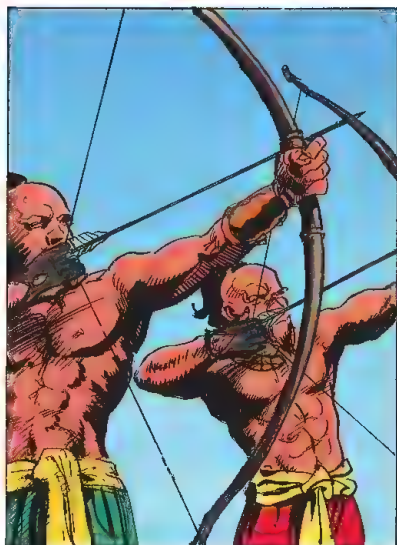


WITH THREE-QUARTERS OF THIS THIRD DAY OVER, THE PROVINCE OF THRACE HAS WON THE WRESTLING AND SWORD FIGHTING TRIALS, WHILE THE PROVINCE OF PONTANT HAS WON THE CHARIOT RACE AND IS LEADING IN THE ARCHERY COMPETITION. THEREFORE, THE PROVINCES OF PONTUS AND ANATOLIA ARE ELIMINATED.



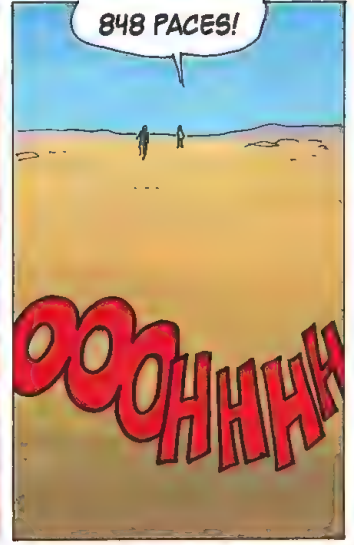
DID YOU HEAR THAT? IF WE WIN THIS RANGE TRIAL, WE'LL BE EVEN WITH THOSE BIG THRACIAN BRUTES.

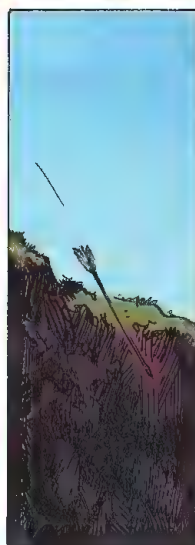
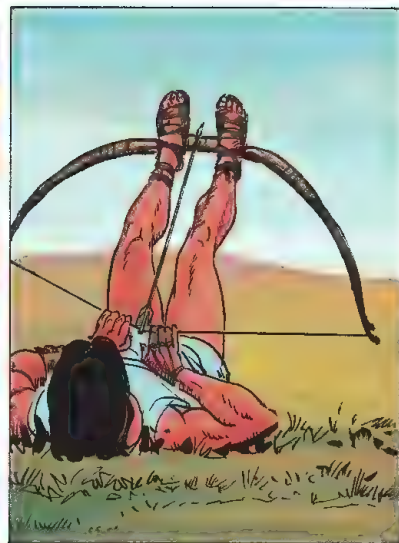
WE HEARD, FATHER. LEAVE US, NOW.



512 PACES!

646 PACES!







WELL, DID YOU FIND HER?

NO.

SHE'S BEEN HIDING FOR TWO DAYS. I KNEW IT. YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE FORCED ME TO RELEASE HER.

BAH. AS I SAID: THIS ISLAND IS TINY. I'LL SEND OUR MEN TO FLUSH HER OUT BEFORE WE SET SAIL TONIGHT. ANYWAY, THERE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DISCUSS, HERACLIUS...



AS FATE WOULD HAVE IT, THE TRIAL THAT WILL DECIDE THE WINNER BETWEEN THE TWO PROVINCES IS TO BE AN ARCHERY TEST: DOVE SHOOTING. IT'LL BEGIN IN LESS THAN AN HOUR.



HAVING WON THE REGULAR COMPETITION, YOU ARE ALREADY CERTAIN OF GOING TO THE EMPEROR'S COURT. BUT THIS LAST TRIAL WILL DETERMINE VICTORY IN THE OVERALL TOURNAMENT.

IN OTHER WORDS, A WHOLE YEAR FREE OF TAX.

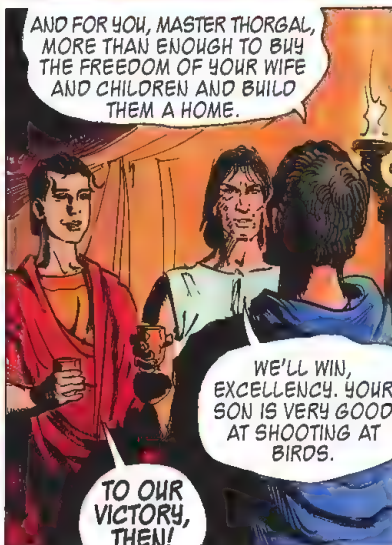


AND HONOUR, HERACLIUS. HONOUR!

THEN, LET'S DRINK TO OUR FAIR PROVINCE'S HONOUR.



IF YOU WIN, I WILL GIVE YOU EACH 50 GOLD COINS. ENOUGH TO SET YOURSELF UP IN THE CAPITAL ACCORDING TO YOUR RANK, HERACLIUS...

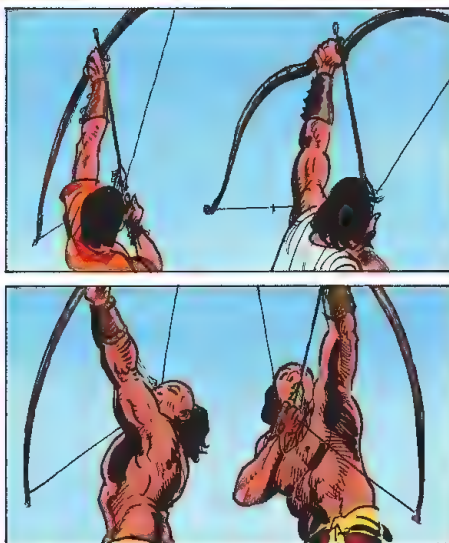


AND FOR YOU, MASTER THORGAL, MORE THAN ENOUGH TO BUY THE FREEDOM OF YOUR WIFE AND CHILDREN AND BUILD THEM A HOME.

WE'LL WIN, EXCELLENCY. YOUR SON IS VERY GOOD AT SHOOTING AT BIRDS.

TO OUR VICTORY, THEN!







SIX TO FIVE FOR THE PROVINCE OF PONANT AFTER THE SECOND RELEASE!

AND WE STILL HAVE THREE ARROWS, WHEREAS YOU ONLY HAVE TWO LEFT...



WE'RE PRACTICALLY CERTAIN TO WIN NOW. YOU'VE PLAYED YOUR ROLE WELL, BARBARIAN. AND THAT ROLE IS NOW OVER.



WHAT... WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?

YOUR BELLY IS STARTING TO BURN, IS IT? AND YOUR HEAD FEELS HEAVY?



LOOK... THE BARBARIAN IS STUMBING...

SOMETHING'S GOING ON.

EXHAUSTION, PERHAPS. OR SUNSTROKE.



MUST BE THE WINE. IT'S NEVER WISE TO DRINK BEFORE A COMPETITION - DIDN'T YOU KNOW?

AARICIA, GIVE ME THE STRENGTH...



SURELY YOU DIDN'T THINK I WAS GOING TO SHARE MY TRIUMPH WITH YOU, YOU FOOL? ENJOY WHATEVER HELL YOU BELIEVE IN. HA! HA!

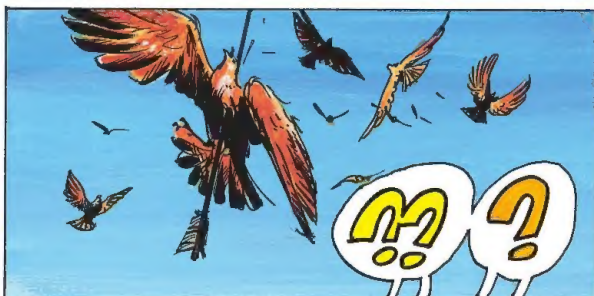


THIRD RELEASE!

TWO DOVES! TWO DOVES WITH THREE ARROWS, AND I WIN!



42





THAT WOMAN!!... GET
THAT WOMAN!!...



I'M COMING,
TIAGO...

THE TIDE IS GOING TO TURN, EXCELLENCY. WE MUST SET SAIL.



HE WAS MY SON, TIBRUS. HE WAS CRUEL, AND VAIN, BUT HE WAS MY OWN FLESH.



COME, LORD. I WILL HAVE HIM BROUGHT ONTO THE SHIP.

WE'LL BUILD HIM A MAUSOLEUM IN THE GARDENS OF THE PALACE, WON'T WE?



THE GRANDEST OF MAUSOLEUMS, EXCELLENCY. WITH THE FINEST MARBLE.

WHO ARE THOSE PEOPLE?

THE THRACIANS. THEY'RE CELEBRATING THEIR HALF-VICTORY.



AS THE TWO PROVINCES FINISHED TIED FOR THE TOURNAMENT, THE PRINCE GRANTED EACH A SIX-MONTH TAX EXEMPTION.



OUR GRAND PRIZE... HOW HOLLOW IT FEELS, TIBRUS. HOW HOLLOW!

AND THE BARBARIAN? IS HE DEAD TOO?



YES, EXCELLENCY. PROBABLY POISONED BY THAT MAD GIRL WHO KILLED YOUR SON. WE'LL NEVER KNOW.



45

THIS BRAVE MAN DESERVES A PROPER GRAVE. BURY HIM WITH HIS BOW AT THE TOP OF THE HILL, WHERE HE LIKED TO LOOK AT THE OCEAN.

AS YOU COMMAND, YOUR HIGHNESS!



DID YOU HEAR HIS HIGHNESS, YOU TWO? GET TO IT!



FFFF... HOW COME IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME ONES WHO GET THE CRAP JOBS?

YOU'LL SEE. THIS IS GOING TO MAKE US MISS THE WINE AND MEAT THEY PROMISED TO HAND OUT AT THE END OF THE TOURNAMENT.



THIS GROUND IS ROCK HARD, TOO. IT'S GOING TO TAKE US HOURS.

JUST LEAVE HIM LIKE THIS. APART FROM THE SEAGULLS AND THE ANTS, WHO'S EVER GOING TO KNOW?



AND WHEN WE COME BACK IN FIVE YEARS, WE'LL HAVE A NICE, CLEAN SKELETON TO PLAY KNUCKLEBONES WITH! HA! HA!



THE END

NEXT EPISODE: *KRISS OF VALNOR*